

CONVERT YOUR OLD DOWNHILLS TO TOURING SKIS

Old wooden downhillis can be converted into rugged, servicable touring skis if care is used in the conversion.

To begin with stay away from obvious junkers. Warped, crooked, split or cracked skis should be relegated to the ash can. The skis should have reasonable camber and if not re-cambering should be attempted before any other labor is invested. The writer has had varying degrees of success in recambering. Generally, laminated skis will have glue line failures even if subjected to only 30 minutes in a steam box. Solid hickory or ash skis can be recambered using the above process, clamping rigidly to a 2"x4" at shovel and tail and blocking up under the binding about 7/8" higher than the desired camber. If you feel obliged to attempt to recamber a laminated ski leave the finish on to reduce moisture penetration, solid ash or hickory will rebend more readily if the finish is removed. Leave blocked up ski on 2x4 at least 10 days to dry and take the new "set". Be not concerned if the tails of your skis are chewed or scratched a bit as most of this will be removed in narrowing the ski.

The first step in converting is to remove all hardware. If your skis have steel edges remove these with care. Often the screw-driver slots will be badly worn or full of base wax, etc. If you must pry the edge up to pull an edge screw free be sure the screw doesn't break off leaving the point imbedded. These broken off screws are murder on a plane blade.

There is nothing holy or sacred about the width of a touring ski but you must preserve the over-all conformation. This is most easily accomplished by merely removing the portion inlitted to receive the steel edges. If the ski to be converted has no edges scribe along each side with a marking gauge. An ideal width will be something like 2 3/4" at shovel, 2 3/8" at waist, and 2 5/8" at the tail.

Unless you are highly skilled, resist the temptation to speed up the job by bandsawing. The bandsaw like other power tools is very unforgiving and the writer has seen a number of potentially good skis ruined by students in a hurry.

The safest way is to use a sharp hand plane. Go lightly at first to determine grain direction and obviously don't plane against it. Grain direction can and does change on the same side of the same ski so proceed cautiously.

This grain problem is further complicated in trimming down laminated skis. Very often the grain of the various lamina will be opposing. As long as you are not tearing the grain too deeply by going against it it is perfectly permissible while roughing to the narrower width. However, when approaching the final finished demension it's advisable to switch to a flat surform tool and then to a fine toothed wood file. Keep the new edges at right angles to the running surface.

A new tip curvature must be formed to blend gracefully with the narrower demensions of the touring ski. Do not follow the inletted grove where the old steel edges curved toward the tip but scribe on the upper surface a new elipse that is more nearly teaspoon shaped. Avoid forming an arrowhead shaped tip. This new tip curvature may include some of the inletted groove on the lower surface of the shovel but this is of no major concern. It will in no way effect the performance of the ski and it can be filled with epoxy or similar compound and sanded smooth if desired.

The next step is to remove all old finish from the tops and plug the old screw holes using good quality glue (Weldwood) and preferably hardwood pegs. Once the glue has set, the pegs can be sawn and sanded flush. To seal out moisture give the upper surface and sides 3 coats of spar varnish sanding lightly with fine sandpaper between coats.

Ordinarilly a touring ski has a hickory running sole sealed against moisture by burning in pine tar. This also guards against wear and makes an excellent base for the ground wax. Some experimentation has been done keeping certain plastic bottoms intact and merely putting the ground wax on the plastic. Northland's Ebonite has worked fairly well, others such as Kofix have not been tested.

Old base wax (downhill variety) can be difficult to remove from ski bottoms. Sharp scrapers work best and a spent cartridge case .30-.45 cal. filed flat across the mouth is very useful in cleaning the center groove.

If the skis have plastic running soles preserve tham. If ultimately it's found that the base or ground wax does not adhere, the plastic bottoms can be striped but this latter process can be quite difficult.

There are several excellent touring bindings available but before one is purchased it should be decided what type of boot will be worn. Touring boots of modest cost serve quite well. Before buying any binding however be sure of several things. First that the mounting screws are well inside the edges of the ski and secondly, that the toeplate adjustment is of sufficient range to accommodate the boot. Stay away from the "Rat trap" or Rottefella binding. It is designed for racing and for a boot that will not provide adequate warmth on cold days or for protracted trips.

Jumping boots, though more expensive and some heavier, make excellent touring boots. The sole is sufficiently flexible, the uppers are a bit higher and they generally are more substantially constructed than the domestic touring boot.

Don't overlook the potentialities of the old Bear Trap binding with cable and foward throw. This combination serves very well, particularly if the down pull clips are mounted just under the toe-plate or are an integral part thereof. An additional set of downpull clips may be placed just under the instep to provide greater control

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for long downhill runs but they should still allow the heel to be raised approximately an inch.

In mounting touring bindings, first stretch a cord from tip of ski to tail. Half this distance measured from the tail of the ski, is where the tip of the ski boot should be. The bindings are purposely mounted slightly rearward to allow the ski to run tip light.

The converted ski will probably never win a beauty contest and certainly it's some heavier and less supple than it's commercial counterpart. However, it is more rugged and less subject to tip breakage. Further more this is an excellent way of inexpensively introducing an individual to the pleasures of touring.

James E. Schwedland '48
Education Officer
Dartmouth Outing Club
Hanover, New Hampshire

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